

Based on the evidence I have seen thus far, I will oppose any resolution that authorizes military action in Syria. In addition, the haphazard manner in which the Obama administration has thus far handled this crisis does not inspire my confidence moving forward.

As a soldier for more than 30 years, I've learned that before taking any military action, you must have a clear objective and a realistic strategy for success. You don't draw "red lines" before you know what you're willing to do to back them up. You don't leak military strategies so people can analyze your potential targets on CNN. The Obama Administration's proposed military strike against Syria fails these tests. In March, I asked U.S. Ambassador to Syria Robert Ford about the Administration's plan should the Assad regime decide to cross the "red line" and use chemical weapons. His vague response alluding to "a variety of options" left me unconvinced that the Administration had a coherent strategy regarding Syria. What has happened in recent weeks has only exacerbated those concerns.

Once chemical weapons were used in Syria, instead of implementing a well thought-out strategy, the administration was clearly caught flat-footed. Speaking Monday in London, Secretary of State John F. Kerry said that a U.S. military strike on Syria would constitute an "unbelievably small, limited kind of effort." Later at the White House, President Obama insisted that any such action would be significant. "The U.S. does not do pinpricks," he told an NBC News interviewer. "Our military is the greatest the world has ever known." The "unbelievably small" military strike touted by Secretary Kerry may not sufficiently degrade or deter the threat posed by Syria's chemical weapons, while any military action could have the unintended consequence of allowing those weapons to fall into the hands of Syrian opposition groups, some of whom have been linked to Al-Qaida.

In the last week, I participated in the House Foreign Affairs Committee hearing regarding Syria, attended classified briefings with Administration officials and discussed the potential options with many of my colleagues in the House and Senate. I also received feedback from hundreds of 4th District residents who are overwhelmingly opposed to military action. They realize that America would have no good options if we inserted ourselves into a civil war rooted in centuries of sectarian hatred between religious groups. They see a domestic economy stuck in neutral, an unsustainable debt approaching \$17 trillion and about 12 million Americans still out of work. While sympathetic to the tragedies of the Syrian civil war, they see the need to focus our energies here at home.

In response to a reporter's question Monday, Secretary Kerry suggested that this crisis could be averted if the Assad regime put its chemical weapons under international control, although the State Department backed away from that comment immediately afterwards. Sensing an opening to help its Syrian ally, Russia jumped on the remark and offered it as a potential diplomatic solution. Even though Obama Administration officials said as early as Monday morning that all diplomatic efforts had been exhausted, largely due to obstruction from Russia, President Obama called this development a potential "breakthrough" just hours later. Administration officials quickly asserted that the threat of force and the Obama Administration's deft diplomacy made this opportunity possible.

This is a face-saving attempt to revise history. Politico summed it up correctly Tuesday when it said "President Barack Obama has stumbled into a possible resolution of the Syria showdown, after an act of apparently accidental U.S. diplomacy seemed to deliver a potential way to wriggle out of his political predicament." Russia, who has supplied the Assad regime with many of the conventional weapons being used in this civil war, has now taken control of this debate.

I welcome any serious and verifiable diplomatic initiative and hope we are actively engaging our allies in this effort. However, I remain deeply skeptical of the intention of the Russian and Syrian governments, especially since Assad refused to acknowledge that his country even had chemical weapons in an interview earlier this week. Instead of choosing military action as a first resort or stumbling into a diplomatic solution in the dark and playing directly into Vladimir Putin's hands, the United States must now set the terms of this diplomatic debate and finally drive the conversation towards the coherent strategy that has been sorely lacking.